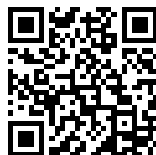

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The Bugler of Algiers

Perley Poore Sheehan

and
Robert H. Davis

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1916

7222

to Mildred G. Larr.

With the compliments of
Frederick Moore



7222

10 Mildred E. Larr.

with the compliments of
Every Body cream

THE BUGLER OF ALGIERS

**By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN
and ROBERT H. DAVIS**



"ANATOLE PICARD WILL BE THERE! ANATOLE PICARD WILL BE THERE!"

The BUGLER *of* ALGIERS

BY
PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN
AND
ROBERT H. DAVIS

*Formerly published under the title of
"WE ARE FRENCH!"*

NEW YORK
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THE BUGLER OF ALGIERS

CHAPTER I

THE GLORY OF CHATILLON

LOISEAU, slovenly of appearance but alert of mind, shuffled about the sanded floor of his tavern serving his customers himself.

It was coming along toward late afternoon, the height of his business day, and the place was comfortably filled and noisy with the usual village crowd—M. Emil Pomponneau, fat and sad, recently elected to succeed himself once more as mayor; Berger, the sexton, disreputable and witty; Deplanche, the local druggist, insignificant but proud; peasants from adjacent hamlets, country artisans.

A type of the perfect host was Loiseau, with a word for everybody, anticipating wants, carrying four bottles at a time, decanting liquors and wiping off tables with a steady hand that belied his sallow flabbiness.

Not only that, but, at the necessary intervals, he still found time to keep his phonograph going.

No one was paying attention to what the thing played—no one except Loiseau and a peasant or two—for it squealed and squalled against a mounting tide of conversation, laughter and dispute, the clink of glasses, the scuffle and scrape of wooden shoes.

There was one selection, however, that always commanded attention in Chatillon. Loiseau slipped the record into place, cranked the machine with a steady hand, started it up, then glanced about him.

He saw the sad and heavy face of M. Pomponneau light up somewhat; saw Berger drain his glass with a heroic gesture; saw Deplanche, the druggist, straighten his thin and insignificant physique. There was an enthusiastic crash of bottles and glasses. Half a dozen voices caught up the refrain.

It was the "Marseillaise."

"Allons, enfants de la patrie——"

Then, in the midst of the refreshed turmoil, there was another diversion.

"Aha! Our friend Pierre!"

"It's M. Dupont."

"Comrade, *bon jour!*"

A little old man, alert and agile despite his white hair, had appeared at the door of the tavern, paused there a moment as he looked about him.

It was fitting that Pierre Dupont arrive to music like that. Some of the younger men present smiled good-naturedly as they joined in the greeting. But the newcomer didn't smile—save, possibly, with his brilliant blue eyes—as he waved his hand in a comprehensive salute, entered, sat down at a table in the center of the room.

"Your pleasure, M. Dupont?" asked Loiseau, attentive.

"A bottle of red wine," said M. Dupont. And he added, with an odd little touch of poetry not always associated with the words: "The wine of my country!"

The phonograph continued to pulse out the refrain to which the Reds of the south once upon a time marched up to Paris.

"Le jour de gloire est arrivé——"

M. Dupont tossed up his head and listened with appreciation while, with one of his ner-

vous hands he beat out the time on the table at his side.

He was an unusual type. He was dressed like the other peasants there—cloth cap, a blue linen smock and wooden shoes—but he would have looked equally at home in a silk hat and broadcloth.

His smoothly shaven, expressive face might have been that of an actor or a poet. His white hair, brushed straight back, fell to his shoulders.

"Ah, '*La Marseillaise*!'" he exclaimed, breaking again into speech.

"Your favorite piece, M. Dupont!" said the mayor of Chatillon.

"Aye; save one!"

"Comrade," said Berger; "here's to France! Me, I'm a patriot, too."

Pierre Dupont smiled, drained the glass of wine that Loiseau had poured out for him.

"*Oui*—great music!" said Pierre Dupont. "It's the music, *parbleu!* to warm the heart of every Frenchman. If they'd played that at Sedan—ah, Lord God! If they'd played that at Sedan——"

He paused and, quite steadily, poured him-

self out a second glass. There was a quality both about his voice and the man himself that had brought the other clients of Loiseau to comparative silence.

"*Oui*," he resumed; "if they had played that at Sedan, or if——"

"That's the difficulty," said Berger, the sexton, who was getting tipsy. "Me, I told the general the same thing. *If*——"

But no one paid attention to him.

M. Deplanche, the druggist, shoved to one side the paper he had been reading. He considered himself the local authority on historical subjects.

"Or if——" he echoed.

"Or if they'd had Anatole Picard there," blazed Pierre Dupont. "If they'd had Anatole Picard there, the glory of Chatillon!"

There was some laughter and some applause at that. Only the phonograph, with artistic detachment, ground on toward its crescent finish.

"*Vive Picard!*" Berger exploded tipsily.

"What you say is absurd," said M. Deplanche severely. "The only reason that we

were defeated at Sedan—if defeat it may be called——”

“I repeat what I said,” Pierre Dupont declared after he had drained his second glass. “O France, if you had only known! What we would have done to the Prussians that day! If Anatole Picard——”

This time he was interrupted by Mayor Pomponneau.

“You were speaking of a certain other piece of music, M. Dupont.”

The mayor was anxious to save himself, as well as the others, from hearing again the story of Anatole Picard. But there was to be no escape. Pierre had sensed the attitude of the crowd. Its good-natured smiles, M. Deplanche’s opposition and the mayor’s remark merely fanned his zeal to greater heat.

“It was precisely of that I was speaking,” he proclaimed in answer to M. Pomponneau. “Aye, the ‘Marseillaise’ is a marvel. Loiseau, play it again! Hear it, and you see again the tattered Reds on their way to Paris—unshaven, unwashed, unconquerable! Hear it, and you feel the throb of triumphant hearts.

O 'Marseillaise,' I salute thee! For thee, we'll again shed tears and blood.

"Great music!

"But, Lord God my witness, I've heard a greater still. It was that day when Anatole Picard blew the 'Charge.'"

"*Vive Picard!*" cried Berger, a little more softly in the deepening silence.

"Aye, *vive* Picard! And to think that he lives here in this village with us, unhonored and unsung! They put up their monuments. To whom? To deputies and senators—to bankers, even! Great God of battle-scarred France! They put up statues to bankers and——"

"And Napoleon," some one put in.

"Napoleon, yes. Oh, the great emperor! Napoleon, I salute thee! But what was Napoleon, *sacrébleu!* compared to Anatole Picard? Napoleon was created by circumstances.

"Anatole Picard created circumstances. That is why he's the glory of Chatillon, citizens. And, so help me—some day, some day—he'll be the glory of the nation as well.

"Do you hear? I myself will lead him to Paris; and France—the France of Jeanne

d'Arc, the France of Napoleon, the France of
—of—"

"Sarah Bernhardt," came a voice from the rear.

But Pierre Dupont checked the laugh as he shouted:

"Yes, and the France of Sarah Bernhardt, *pardi*—will salute thee, also, Anatole Picard, *sacré bon soir!*—as I salute thee now!"

He jerked off his cap and whirled it down to the table, knocking his glass off as he did so. It fell with a crash.

In the momentary confusion, as they kicked the pieces of fallen glass under the table and Pierre caught his breath, an old peasant who did not get into the village very often forced his way forward.

"*Monsieur,*" he asked in a quavering voice, "just what did this Anatole do?"

CHAPTER II

THE LEGEND OF GABRIELLE

THERE fell a momentary silence on the assemblage as Pierre and the old peasant looked at each other.

It caught the natives of Chatillon by surprise that there could be any one thereabouts who had not heard Pierre bragging about his old friend Anatole before. Then, there was the beginning of a laugh and Loiseau had started his phonograph again to playing the "Marseillaise."

Pierre Dupont tossed back his long white hair.

"Silence!" he commanded with sudden intensity. "M. Loiseau, if you please, stop that machine."

Then, as silence became absolute—save for the small, soft sounds of the country that drifted in through the open door—the old man's face relaxed into a mystic smile. He looked at the surprised tavern-keeper.

"My friend," he said softly, "suppose that you put on that lullaby piece—what is it?—the *berceuse*——"

"The *berceuse* from 'Jocelyn,' " said Loiseau.

"That's it."

He surveyed his audience—Pierre Dupont did—with that mystic smile still on his face, an air of suppressed fire about him that, more than once before, had held these men captivated, they scarcely knew why.

Berger wiped a tear from his eye—and he didn't know why, either. "You think I'm going to bore you with the old story, my friends? Listen, and I'll tell you something that you've never heard."

He paused as there came from Loiseau's machine the first faint notes of an orchestral accompaniment to Godard's sentimental masterpiece.

"He had a sister, did Anatole, my friends. Her name was Gabrielle. She was the most beautiful girl of Miribel, where all the girls were beautiful—yellow hair, malicious brown eyes, milk and strawberry skin.

"Gabrielle at seventeen! Ah, sweet France,

with daughters like that, is it astonishing that thy sons are poets and painters?

"That was Gabrielle; and when she said to me: 'Pierre, you will accompany Anatole into Algeria for his military service; he is hot-headed, you are cool; and bring him back to me safe and sound—to me, the only mother he has, Pierre—and I'll—I'll marry you'—*me*, I dropped to one knee and swore by my mother's heart—she who also was dead—that I'd do it."

By this time a girl's voice, soft and distant, was intoning the lullaby from the phonograph. The crowd was listening intently. Even M. Pomponneau, the mayor, had apparently managed, somehow, to still the asthmatic laborings of his tortured breast.

"There came the day that we marched away," said Pierre Dupont, tossing his head like a bard about to begin a song of his own. "Gabrielle, the beautiful, stood in the door of her cottage and tried to smile. We were Zouaves dressed up in our new uniforms. Ah, those were uniforms—such blue, such red, such shining brass!

"We wiped the taste of Gabrielle's tears from our lips. We swallowed the lumps in our

throats. Eyes front along the white and dusty road, my children, for seven years' service in Algeria! One-two! One-two! Straight on to the top of the hill—where we were alone—where we dared look back.

"How beautiful was Miribel—a bower of hollyhocks, pink, white, blue, purple, orange. There never were such hollyhocks as bloomed in Miribel; there never have been since.

"We looked back, and there was the village like a flower garden with toy-houses in it; vineyards and meadows all around; all drowsy in the yellow sunshine, as though the old sun had been pouring out sauterne in honor of the two recruits, in honor of the glorious destiny that awaited Anatole down there.

"A hero predestined! See it in his straight back, his noble carriage; his level, kindling glance. I—I merely kept my vow to Gabrielle. He kept his vow to France.

"He showed me how to fight, to bleed, to suffer. Mother of angels! There was something that I learned without his aid. It was the meaning of fear. He couldn't teach me that because he didn't know what it was—no, not in the face of grinning hell!



"GREAT MUSIC! BUT . . . I'VE HEARD A GREATER STILL . . . THAT
DAY WHEN ANATOLE PICARD BLEW THE 'CHARGE'!"

"See—see—I tell you!—that day at Sidi-Baroun.

"See! A French regiment with only half its complement, many of these already wounded and sick. It makes another desperate stand at the close of a frightful day—a day without rest, a day without water, a day under the hot, beating wings of the angel of death. Around it ten thousand Moors, splendidly mounted, charge and circle and skirmish.

"Lord God of Compassion!

"Thunder of hoofs, volley after volley, the roar of cannon and the shriek of shell, a pall of dust and smoke that stifles the sun to black and red; shriek of men and scream of horses.

"The wells! They are just over there! We must get to the wells. On all other sides the merciless desert shuts us in. Water, or we die! The pagans charge. Our men stand firm. Live God and France! The pagans charge again, and we are prisoners—Anatole and I.

"They see the bugle hanging at his side.

"'Frenchman,' cries the Arab chief, 'blow the "Retreat" and you'll escape the torture.'

"Blow the 'Retreat'! Do you know what that would mean? It meant that the campaign

was lost. It meant that all the fire and blood of our martyred comrades had been spent in vain—that the flag—our flag—the flag of France—would be booted back into that hell of sands whence we had followed it.

"Anatole swung the bugle to his lips.

"The 'Retreat,' " the Arab says, and there is murder in his eye and voice.

"Ah, this is Africa—black, pitiless, and grim; slaughter-house and graveyard—death, ugly and unsung!

"And up there is France—radiant, glorious, the masterpiece of God! Where Gabrielle awaited us in her garden of hollyhocks! O garden of wine and song and aspiration!

"He swung the bugle to his lips. He drew his breath. And there sprang from that lily of brass the cry of France herself—the '*Charge!*'—not the 'Retreat!' but the '*Charge!*'

"Anatole had blown the '*Charge!*'

"Oh, 'twas then death took me by the hand. All light went out, all sound, all thirst and weariness. I was face to face with Gabrielle. She smiled at me. I smiled at her. I said: 'God's taken my job.' I heard the angels sing—just over a spirit-army with a tattered

French flag at its head—and leading the army was Anatole—to victory out of defeat!—to life out of death!

“And so it was. He had saved the day. He had saved the regiment. And when they brought me back to life I thanked God, not for saving me, but that He had created one such man; and him—a Frenchman!”

There was a momentary pause as Pierre Dupont, his face illumined, stared out in the twilight of the big, low-raftered room at something that the others present could not see. Even the phonograph seemed to pause as the girl’s voice died out and the orchestra took up the prelude to the second stanza of the cradle-song.

“And Gabrielle, old comrade?” said Berger, serious at last, almost tearful. “She of the milk and strawberry skin——”

“*Oui!*” panted M. Pomponneau. “How about *mademoiselle?*”

Pierre, still absorbed, shook his head as one does who meditates.

“In seven years we returned. The Prussians had come and gone. There where we had stood before on the top of the hill to look back at

Miribel, we stood again. But Miribel was no more. Gone! Gone! Only a few of its bones were there—a few smoke-stained walls. Its people were scattered. Its hollyhocks were dead.

"And Gabrielle? Likewise gone! Whither? God knows. An accident—an elopement—an abduction? Mystery! Sweet innocence, young beauty—often the world steals these things and hides them away.

"We sought everywhere. Paris? Paris had been through the Commune. Shuddering France was just awakening from her nightmare. We came to Chatillon—gentle Chatillon—so like our lost Miribel!

"You know the rest? Not so!

"Some day—who knows? While France lives—while God rules—a crown of glory for Anatole—and then—*then*—Gabrielle! Gabrielle! We await thee still, thou of the yellow hair and the dark, malicious, tender, sparkling eye! My vow to thee still stands in the book of heaven! Thy promise to me——"

Pierre Dupont stopped suddenly. Perhaps he was afraid that his emotion was getting the

better of him. Perhaps he merely thought that he had said enough.

He glanced at the mayor, something of the mystic elation still lingering in his eyes, and asked quite gently:

“And you, *monsieur le maire*, does your health continue to improve?”

CHAPTER III

M. AGNEAU GETS A LETTER

THERE must have been an element of prophecy in Pierre Dupont's monologue in Loiseau's tavern that afternoon. There often is in faith like his—when it dares express itself.

Chatillon was one of those villages whose names, when printed on maps at all, appear in very small italics. There was only one street, and this merely a part of the National Road by which the automobilists rushed by from Paris on their way to the eastern frontier and back again.

The houses, all of them built of stone and most of them with roofs of thatch, were homely, small and plain.

Here and there, even where the walls had been repeatedly white-washed, were still to be seen deep scratches and pot-marks, put there by the bullets of the invaders in 1870.

In one of these cottages—the last one to the east along Chatillon's single street—Pierre

Dupont and Anatole Picard had lived ever since that long and fruitless quest of theirs for the missing Gabrielle.

The house was somehow characteristic of its inhabitants, as houses often are.

There was its location, for example—closer than any of its neighbors to the blood-drenched frontier. More than any of its neighbors, it had been scarred and broken by hostile bullets.

There was even something about it to suggest that ancient, living romance of theirs; for the front yard was filled with hollyhocks, and the house itself had that look of clean brightness about it that only the hand of a woman can give.

Six or seven years ago they had adopted Annette—when Annette had found all other doors shut against her, more or less; likewise Annette's baby, who had since grown up to be one of the brightest little girls in the village, Céleste—honorary granddaughter to both of them.

But, in spite of the honor and love that was showered upon him in this haven of refuge, Anatole Picard—albeit “the glory of Chatil-

lon"—gave out an impression of heaviness and age.

As Pierre saw his old friend approach along the path from the small field and vineyard they worked together he noticed, with a pang, that Anatole appeared to feel the burden of his years more than ever.

"Comrade-God," he whispered; "thy promise!"

Anatole was the weary old lion—massive, gnarled, even noble in a way; but the peasant, his nobility that of homely, earthly things. His face had lighted up only slightly when Céleste kissed him. His smile was more of the eyes than of the lips as he silently saluted Pierre.

"We were just talking of you over at the tavern," said Pierre. "I tell you, old man, they never weary of that."

Anatole made a brief gesture of modest dissent.

"The cabbages are looking well," he replied.

"And Loiseau was playing the 'Marseillaise,'" Pierre went on, with a reminiscent laugh; "and, *pardi*, it seemed as though we were all back in the thick of it again."

"In my opinion," Anatole proceeded grave-

ly, "we'll have to spray the vines next to the peach orchard. If the phylloxera gets a start——"

Pierre clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"Always the same! Always the same!" he cried. "Me, I come home running over with the splendor of your heroism, the very sparrows chirping the 'Marseillaise,' the roosters crowing the 'Charge'——"

"Who's ready for the soup?" cried Annette, suddenly appearing in the open door with a huge tureen in her hands. Buxom, merry and kind, Annette was a different creature from the outcast they had taken in a few years ago.

About her mother's skirts Céleste danced. The prospect of food always did bring out Céleste's exuberance.

"Soldiers," she declaimed, "behold the soup!"

"S-h!" went Annette. "Now be polite."

But the two old comrades answered the call, still engrossed each in his favorite theme. As usual, when the weather was mild and fine, they ate at an iron table in the little front garden.

It was pleasanter there, and reminiscent of many things, with the hollyhocks blooming around and every breeze, whether from the vil-

lage or from the river and the hills that lay beyond, laden with the fragrances of the land they loved.

Now it was the faint, pungent odor of garlic; now the equally appetizing aroma of old wine-barrels; again, the perfume of milk and hay.

The old men ate alone, although, every now and then, either Céleste or her mother appeared at the door of the cottage to see that their wants were supplied. Anatole, the hero, drew in his soup with gurgling gusto; for he had done a hard day's work, and was frankly hungry.

Pierre showed less interest in his food, more interest in his thoughts.

Down the street, Loiseau was still running his phonograph, for this was the hour when still other regular customers dropped in for their evening dominoes or a round at *manille*. Nearer by, some young mother was singing, "Oh, mountaineer! Oh, mountaineer!" as she put her baby to sleep.

There was a hum of well being over the village as pervasive as its agreeable bucolic smells.

Then from the squat church-tower came a

creaking complaint, the subdued sob of a broken bell.

Old Berger, the sexton, was ringing the Angelus.

Anatole Picard, as soon as the tolling ceased and the toning reverberation died away somewhat, drained his glass of red wine, cleared his throat.

"Annette," he called, "my pipe!"

But the sound of the bell had apparently carried the mind of Pierre Dupont back once more to his lost Miribel, that other village where hollyhocks had bloomed, to his lost Gabrielle. There was an air of dreaminess about him as he rolled and lit a cigarette, held the match for Anatole's pipe.

"You know, comrade," said Pierre, "it's all very well for you to mock at such heroism as yours; but it isn't right. Where would France be if it weren't for her heroes? Who would there be to inspire her youth, keep alive her great traditions? Now, if I were the government——"

Anatole was puffing at his pipe with the same gusto he had displayed in eating his soup.

Food, tobacco, wine—these were the soften-

ing influences of his more rigorous nature. He looked across at his friend with only a hint of a smile to relieve his stolidity, but there was likewise a hint of tenderness in his gruff voice as he asked:

"And what would he do, Pierre, if he were the government?"

Before Pierre could answer they were hailed by a gentle voice from the gate. They turned and saw Abbé Agneau standing there, the curate of Chatillon.

"My friends," he said, "I bring good news—a letter from Paris."

"A letter from Paris!"

The curate, older than either of them, came in and seated himself in a vacant chair. He drew out an envelope—slowly adjusted his spectacles.

"It comes," he said with gentle solemnity, "from the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown!"

CHAPTER IV

"COME TO PARIS!"

THE curate let the significance of this title sink in as he gravely put two lumps of sugar in his coffee and slowly stirred it; then, after a preliminary sip, he repeated gravely:

"From the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown!"

"Why," cried Pierre, "it must be concerning Anatole."

"Precisely," the curate answered. And he quoted gaily from the "Marseillaise": "The day of glory has arrived."

Pierre addressed himself to Céleste, who had taken her usual place on his knee:

"Do you hear? They've written about your Père Anatole."

The "Glory of Chatillon" was also moved, perhaps, but he didn't show it.

"What do they say?" he asked.

The curate cleared his throat, readjusted his spectacles and began to read:

"To M. l'Abbé Agneau, Chatillon.

"DEAR SIR:

"By a happy accident our society has just learned of the presence in your commune of one Anatole Picard, bugler under the immortal Colonel Beauchamp in the Algerian campaign of 1871, notably at the attack on Sidi-Baroun.

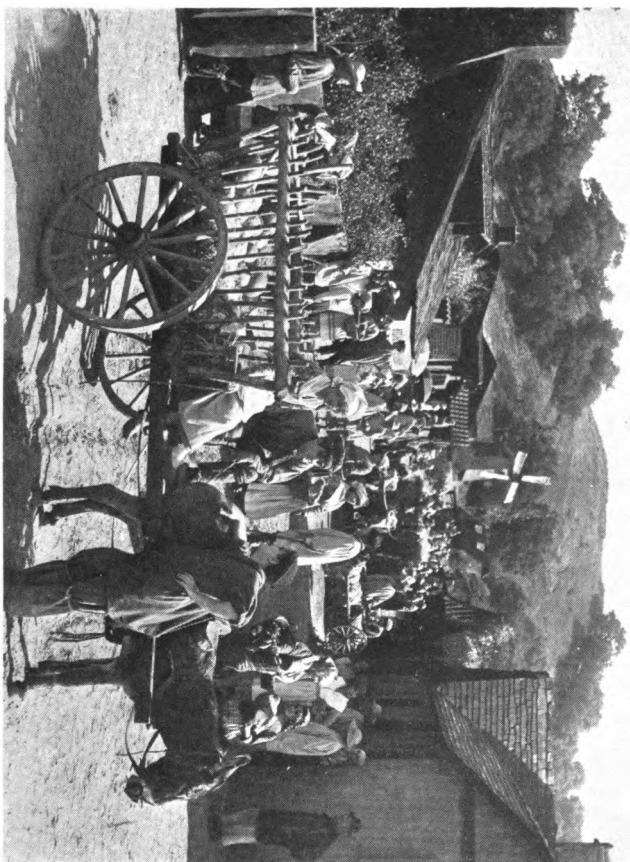
"In fact, one of our most celebrated colleagues learned of the presence of M. Picard at Chatillon, and heard the story of his heroism from a certain Pierre Dupont, believed to have been Picard's comrade in that fray.

"Now, M. l'Abbé, as you know, the purpose of our beloved and patriotic society is to rescue such heroes as M. Picard from oblivion.

"Our annual banquet and reception is to be held in precisely three weeks. The president of the republic has promised to be present in person. He was to have conferred the cross of the Legion of Honor on Brigadier Moulin, but, most unfortunately, the brigadier has just died.

"Our colleague, therefore, had the happy inspiration—Picard instead of Moulin—embarrassing situation——"

The good abbé had begun to skip. The sun had gone down and the golden dusk was deepening.



"SWEET FRANCE, WITH DAUGHTERS LIKE THAT, IS IT ASTONISHING THAT THY
SONS ARE POETS AND PAINTERS?"

"Bring a lamp," cried Pierre, with boyish enthusiasm.

"Don't bother," said the curate; "I know the rest of it. You've heard enough. Pierre Dupont, your dream is realized. Comrade Picard, you are to proceed to Paris, to receive, from the hands of the president of the republic himself, the cross you have so richly earned."

"But, I'm—I'm unworthy." Anatole protested, hoarsely.

"*Fi donc*, old Harvester of Blood!" cried Pierre.

"I won't go unless you go with me, Pierre," said Anatole, yielding.

"Me, I've already spoken of that," said the curate. "See, before I came here, I wrote my answer—that Anatole Picard would be there to receive his long-delayed recognition on the day mentioned, and that his old comrade in arms would, perhaps, be there to witness the affair."

"I'd like to go," said Pierre; "but, you see, that sort of thing isn't for the likes of me. I'm a peasant. It's enough for me to be the friend of a hero——"

He broke off, drained his glass of cognac,

sang the opening phrase of his beloved "Marseillaise"—"*Allons enfants de la patrie*——"

"In three weeks," Anatole Picard broke in. "No, it can't be. See—the grapes will just be needing my attention every day, even if I can leave the other things for a while."

"Anatole Picard," said the curate, with an assumption of authority, "you're going to go. So is Pierre. While you're gone—I'll answer for it—your grapes and cabbages become the protégés of the commune."

Annette had placed a lamp just inside the cottage window, and, as the night deepened, the three friends continued their debate. Anatole still protested that he was not worthy of such a distinction, that he held such things with indifference, anyway; but his friends were obdurate.

"You risked your life to save the regiment," Pierre cried; "to uphold the honor of France!"

"Bah! You'd have done it, too."

"Not so! Me, I was scared to death. If it hadn't been for you——"

"You were singing all the time—cheering the other fellows up!"

"Ah, *monsieur le curé*," cried Pierre; "at last,

at last! Only this afternoon I was speaking about this thing."

"And how about the boys we left in the field, down there?" Anatole went on, with ponderous protest.

"They've gone to their reward," said the Abbé Agneau.

"As I will go," said Anatole. "And decorated, too—as a soldier ought to be decorated—with the red ribbon of blood, *pardi*. Me, I was wounded, down there. That's all the decoration I need."

Anatole paused, put a huge, rough hand into the breast of his blouse and brought out a packet carefully wrapped in paper and tied with a string. He undid the wrappings with the patient care of an old man, revealed at last what the packet contained.

It was the service-book of a French soldier. There was a ragged hole in it, and, round this hole, was an unmistakable smudge of black and brown.

"And this," he said, simply, "will be on my breast when they lay me away. It is decoration enough."

But, in the meantime, the news had spread.

A couple of children, coming home from the river-meadows with their cows, had heard the news and told their parents. Mlle. Marie, the curate's sister, had imparted the purport of the letter to her particular friend, the postman, and he had conveyed it to the conviviais at Loiseau's.

And now, the neighbors flocked in, hungry for details. There was a good deal of excitement, questions tinged with awe.

"Is it that the president will come to Chatillon in person?"

"Is it that M. Picard will remain in Paris?"

It was Deplanche, the apothecary, who answered most of these questions. He already had the Violet Ribbon, and hitherto had been the only decorated citizen in the commune.

This popular ignorance of decorations annoyed him. But he had taken a chair near Anatole, the better to shine in his reflected glory, and he kept turning to the veteran for confirmation of his statements.

"And the president will kiss you on each cheek, will he not, M. Picard?"

"And the ribbon carries a pension with it, does it not, M. Picard?"

Every one was happy and proud.

"You see, you can't refuse," said the old curate softly.

Two gendarmes, taciturn, dignified, were as proud as any one to take up a place just back of the hero and at the side of the open window. They received the glasses of cognac that Annette passed out to them and thanked her with military precision.

"*Merci, madame!*"

Berger, the sexton, innocent of the presence of the curate, appeared, comfortably filled with Loiseau's wine, bringing his flageolet with him and a subdued cry went up for a dance, growing louder as the curate merely smiled and turned his head. Berger, with vinous good humor, after a false start or two, squealed into the air of a *rigodon*.

The curate bade his old friends a hasty good-night.

"Well then, it's understood?"

"Understood, *monsieur l'abbé*," cried Pierre; "to the glory of Chatillon!"

Anatole had remained solemn, absorbed, amid the general liveliness, but he touched his glass to Pierre's and to the abbé's coffee-cup.

"To the glory of France," he said.

The music squealed louder, accompanied by the songs, the shouts and laughter of the dancers. Already, the cause of the gathering was temporarily forgotten.

Even the punctilious Deplanche, the apothecary, had gone to look on, to shout encouragement as some particularly buxom girl reeled and saluted—lightly and gracefully, despite her wooden shoes and heavy skirts.

Berger suddenly stopped his music with a falsetto *zip*.

"I'm thirsty," he shouted. "Every one come to Loiseau's!"

He began to play again, a lively march this time, and started off down the street—a village *Pied Piper*.

There were shouted good nights, the two gendarmes again drained their glasses with military precision, then, pausing long enough for a formal salute to the two old veterans, strolled off after the merrymakers.

CHAPTER V

AS SOLDIERS SHOULD

FOR a long time after they were left alone, the two old men continued to smoke in silence.

The night deepened. The stars hung low and brilliant. Up from the lush river-bottoms came the cadenced thrill of crickets and frogs.

At last Pierre turned and looked at his friend.

"Anatole," he said.

Anatole started, looked up with lines of sadness accentuated on his rugged old face.

"My friend," Pierre went on, "see, the thing comes to pass."

"I am glad for your sake," said Anatole hoarsely; "but for an old camel like me——"

"I always told you that it would come to pass," said Pierre, falling still deeper under the spell of the mood that had come over him; "and this will not be all. You'll see."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—Gabrielle."

"She is dead."

"Don't say it," said Pierre. "Listen. I dare tell you what I wouldn't dare tell others—not even Abbé Agneau. But I demanded this thing of our Comrade-God. Nor was it all."

"It's enough. What right have we——"

"What right? What right? The right of the longing in the hearts of us."

"I can't follow you. Your thoughts were never meant for such as me."

"How often, on nights like this, when I've been out on the road alone, have I heard the whisper of her voice! She lives, I tell you. And it was this that I demanded of the good Lord, as well—that when France took you to her heart at last and gave you the accolade, hung the cross on your breast, that she be there. I tell you that the favor will never be granted only in part. Such favors never are. The good Lord's too great, too generous——"

"It cannot be."

"It can be—it shall be!" thrilled Pierre.

He turned his ascetic face to the sky, tossed back his long, white hair.

"Never before have I spoken to you of this, because first of all I wanted a sign. The sign

has come—in the letter to M. Agneau. But, all the time that we were looking for Gabrielle, you and I, her voice kept coming to me—very faint at times—oh, the tiniest little whisper at times—but her voice. Do you hear?”

“You speak of the impossible.”

“No—there is no impossible. We are going to find her, I tell you. I know it. On the day of your glory she’ll be there. I’ve demanded it of God. He has given us a sign.”

There was another outburst of music from Berger’s flageolet at the other end of the street mingled with faint shouts and laughter.

“Do you remember that night we all went to the dance at the mill?” asked Pierre.

“You speak of the impossible,” Anatole persisted. “You speak of fifty years ago; and where are those fifty years now? They are gone. Gabrielle is gone.”

“And that night,” Pierre continued, unmindful of Anatole’s dissent, “I saw a light in her eyes. *Seigneur!* I saw such a light in her eyes. I can’t describe it to you—the strangest, most wonderful, drollest light in the world. It was somewhat as though she had said: ‘I can see into every particle of your being, Pierre Du-

pont, and it isn't worth much as it is; but I can take it and work over it and transform it into something pretty good.'

"And I answered back—not out loud, but merely to myself: 'Do it. Do it. You can turn me into a general or a king.'"

Anatole was looking at his friend, not altogether comprehending.

"We are only peasants," he said.

"Well, that last night that we were in Paris—when we were so tired and sad, just about ready to shoot ourselves—do you remember?—that night I saw her face again as plainly as I did at the night of the dance; and she had the same light in her eyes—"

"Paris is a mighty big city," said Anatole Picard.

"And I knew then that she wasn't dead. I can't explain it. Who can ever explain the conviction of one's heart? But listen! Who knows? Perhaps it will be on this very visit to Paris—"

"One hundred kilometers by road," Anatole reflected.

Berger, down at the tavern, was playing the "Carmagnole," and this time the music in-

truded itself into Pierre Dupont's mood, set his thoughts in a new and cheerful direction.

"I don't like Paris," said Anatole.

"Ah, just now," said Pierre Dupont, "it was as though we were already there. Paris! Paris of the Revolution! Paris of the guillotine, of the National Assembly, of the barricades! Paris of the Bastille, the Louvre, the Tuileries! Paris of Marie Antoinette, of Robespierre, of the great emperor!

"Oh, God, comrade, can't you see it—now blue and silver in the first light of morning, the Seine sparkling, its roofs shining like mirrors, the somber towers of old Notre Dame upstanding like a fortress of the Lord?"

Anatole Picard, absorbed with his own line of thought, merely answered: "*We are French!*"

The dancing had begun again, farther down the street. Inspired to rivalry by Berger's music, a nightingale off in the shadows of a neighboring garden somewhere began to warble and trill.

"Paris, the mysterious, the beautiful, the tragic, the gay!" Pierre Dupont went on. "*Tiens!* Listen to the nightingale. There are

nightingales in Paris, so they say. What if—what if Gabrielle *is* there, some place? What if she is listening now to the song of a nightingale, just as she used to long ago?"

"Comrade," said Anatole Picard, coming out of his reverie, "we are French; we are soldiers. We'll go to Paris as you and *monsieur l'abbé* suggest, as this great and good society demands; but—"

"And we'll go first-class. It is I who'll buy the tickets."

"No; it is of that I was about to speak. We'll go—not in a wagon like ordinary peasants; not in a railroad train; neither third-class, like ordinary people, nor first-class like the rich bourgeois. We'll go—"

"I always told you that you were built of heroic stuff," cried Pierre, unable to wait. "How, then, *mon général?*"

"We'll go like soldiers," roared Anatole Picard. "We'll march it—on foot!"

CHAPTER VI

"SOLDIERS, FORWARD, MARCH!"

As word of this heroic decision spread abroad on the following day the wonder and delight of Chatillon steadily increased. Paris lay a hundred-odd kilometers to the west.

The roads were good, to be sure, and there was ample time to make it in easy stages; but this robbed the project of none of its Spartan grandeur.

Deplanche, the apothecary, was for forming a bicycle squad to accompany the veterans, he himself offering to act as captain; but his wife got wind of the affair before the movement could be organized, and she sat down upon it.

There were plenty, however, who expressed their determination to bear the two old men company, going, like them, on foot. They caught up Picard's phrase—"We are French!"—and repeated it among themselves for self-encouragement and the encouragement of others.

Berger, the sexton, was the most enthusiastic of all—secretly lured to the enterprise by thought of all the taverns, hotels, and restaurants along the way—open house, payment refused, smiles from the women, unlimited wine.

"Me," he boasted; "I'll be the music of the troupe. Get me? We won't march those measly hundred kilometers; we'll dance them!"

All the young peasants for ten miles round felt the call and invented errands that would take them to Chatillon.

Deplanche and Berger, rivals in a way, got together at last and organized a marching club—"The Youth of Chatillon." Mme. Deplanche had decided, finally and beyond appeal, that Deplanche would remain at home, but the little man was consoled. He easily absorbed Berger's shadowy authority, had much to do and much to say.

Loiseau offered his tavern as club-room and meeting-place and did a roaring trade.

As for the young ladies of Chatillon and the surrounding country, they were not to be outdone in this outburst of enthusiasm. Even before the marching club was fairly well organ-

ized they had begun work on the colors to be carried.

These consisted of a tricolored banner of heavy silk, blue, white, and red; and in the midst of the white field was embroidered, in gold thread, that phrase of Picard's which was by way of becoming famous: "We are French."

All of these preparations continued apace.

After much discussion it was decided that the marching uniform of the Youth of Chatillon would be a white linen cap and ordinary civilian attire. Thus, the expense of this part of the demonstration could be reduced to twenty cents.

The Youth of Chatillon met every evening in the market-place, and there, to the directions of Deplanche, the apothecary, and the music of Berger's flageolet, marched and counter-marched until thirst stampeded them all to Loiseau's.

There was something stirring about it all—a subtle hint of tragedy—just as there must have been about the merry preparations for war toward the close of the second empire.

And, oddly enough, about the only ones in

the village, apart from the curate and his sister, Mlle. Marie, who took no part in these public preparations, were the two persons whom they most greatly concerned—Pierre Dupont and Anatole Picard.

In the first place, neither the curate nor his sister had looked with favor on Anatole's heroic resolution. They said, both of them, severally and repeatedly, that such a march for men so old was filled with peril.

Anatole was firm.

"We'll go as soldiers, or not at all."

"You argue with him," they urged Pierre.

Pierre was inclined to agree with the curate and his sister. He told them so.

"But I'm not a hero," he always added. "How can we understand the working of his mind, the demands of his soul? No, my friends, if Anatole says we'll walk, we'll walk!"

But the strongest objection of all in the days of preparation came from the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown. Hardly a day passed after Anatole's decision was announced to the society but that the curate received a fresh letter of protest from Dissard, the society's fluent secretary.



"WE WIPED THE TASTE OF GABRIELLE'S TEARS FROM OUR LIPS,
WE SWALLOWED THE LUMPS IN OUR THROATS."

M. Dissard as much as intimated that, since one hero had practically broken his promise to them by dying before he could receive a decoration, the society desired above all else, to take measures against such a thing happening again.

"Especially now," he wrote, "when the banquet has been all ordered and the invitations sent out and the president sure to come. Why, think, *monsieur l'abbé*, what a disaster! Our society would never be able to get up another function again!"

But, as Pierre had said, what did they know about the working of the hero's mind, the demands of his soul?

Anatole had always been like that—slow to warmth, but, once warmed, uncooling. He had been like that as a youth. It was the characteristic that had blossomed so magnificently in the Algerian desert at Sidi-Baroun.

Old age had confirmed it.

And Pierre, better than any one else in the world, knew just how impossible it was to alter Anatole's decision now. Slowly he had warmed up to that purpose of marching on Paris as a soldier should. A pistol at his head would no

more have influenced him than it did that day he had blown the "Charge!"

Unmindful of the protests, either from Paris or from the curate of Chatillon, Anatole, seconded by Pierre, went about his preparations with slow assurance.

"The banquet," he said, "is set for June 25. We'll be there—won't we, Pierre?—or die in the attempt."

"But we don't want you to die—that's what they're afraid of," said Pierre.

"They're of another generation," said Anatole. "What do they know about marching? What do they know about old roadsters like us? Do you remember how we used to eat up the kilometers—down there in Africa?"

"Nothing to eat but that, washed down by a bowl of air!" Pierre added gaily, recalling his ancient soldier slang.

"Sure!" Anatole went on. "Now, we'll leave Chatillon on the 18th; and this will give us one good long week to get to Paris in, and—*sapristi!*—if we can't make fifteen kilometers a day, may I never put on this old uniform again!"

Both Pierre and Anatole had brought out

their old Zouave uniforms, everything complete from gaiters to *chéchias*—the fezlike turban of the Algerian troops. They inspected these minutely, brushed and cleaned them with loving care.

The uniforms seemed larger than they used to be.

Even Anatole—whose frame was still big-boned and powerful—seemed to shrink a little as he donned the old garments for the first time. Annette was for “taking them in” a little, especially the jackets; but neither of the veterans would hear of it.

“And you can’t blame the trousers for being baggy,” Pierre laughed softly. “’Tis their nature, *pardi!* And if the gaiters are no longer filled out, why, the walking will be easier.”

The days slipped by.

“The Youth of Chatillon” drilled under the watchful eye of M. Deplanche, the apothecary—fewer of them, now that the first enthusiasm had worn off. The new banner had been finished—stiff, raw, and heavy. Anatole Picard’s papers, duly attested, had been sent off by the Abbé Agneau to Paris so that the official diploma could be prepared.

On the night of June 17 Loiseau gave a banquet for the Youth of Chatillon at two francs a head, and every one drank to the new banner, to the success of the march, to Alsace-Lorraine, to Madagascar, Algeria, Cochin-China; and Deplanche, overcome by patriotic emotion, broke down and cried.

An effort had been made to have Pierre and Anatole at the banquet; but the two veterans, as old campaigners, knew the value of a good night's rest and a clear head and had gone to bed early.

The march was to begin at nine o'clock.

The day dawned wondrously fine, as soft to the senses as perfumed velvet.

And, although there were but few of the whitecaps of the Youth of Chatillon about, the village early took on an air of suppressed excitement. There were almost as many peasants in from neighboring farms and communes as on market-day.

And those villagers who usually were off to fields, vineyards, and pastures at sunup had lingered to see the start.

Loiseau, who hadn't been to bed at all, had started his phonograph at six, was playing

nothing but patriotic airs, and was doing a rushing trade in coffee and white wine.

At eight o'clock the church-bells—three of them, and the largest of them cracked—set up a lively carillon. It wasn't Berger, that was certain, for Berger had been one of the last to leave the banquet board.

An extra thrill went round when it was learned that the bell-ringer was the postman, working under the personal supervision of Mlle. Marie.

At eight-thirty appeared the mayor of the village, M. Emil Pomponneau, his globular form circumnavigated by a tricolored scarf. His asthma and gout, which kept him indoors except on the most important occasions, added to his dignity.

A little later the Abbé Agneau appeared, white and frail, and then all the school children in their best bibs and tuckers.

Cheers broke out as Charles Groisy, who had been elected the night before as color-bearer, came out of Loiseau's with the new banner held aloft. He was followed by half a dozen white-caps, looking shy and self-conscious in spite of Loiseau's white wine.

There was a crowd by this time in front of the last cottage to the east.

The children began to sing, piping high and shrill:

France, O my motherland,
Queen of the universe—

And many of the old folks began to blow their noses and wipe their tears away. And then there was a cheer in earnest as the door of the cottage was thrown open and Anatole Picard appeared, followed by Pierre.

It must have been something like that, half a century ago, when they left the door of another cottage in their brave, Zouave uniforms, heads up, smiling; for now, as then, did not each have the taste of a woman's tears on his lips?

For Annette had cried. She couldn't help it. And so had Céleste. And they were still crying in there, where no one could see.

But the two old soldiers were dry-eyed. It was as though those ancient, misfit uniforms had brought back to them something of the light-hearted, surface cynicism of their soldier days.

They saluted the abbé, saluted the mayor—who made a brief, inaudible speech—saluted the two *gendarmes*, who stood very military at the other side of the road, and who returned the salute with severe, military precision.

"And the Youth!" exclaimed Pierre good-naturedly.

"We're waiting for Berger," Groisy answered. He was already perspiring from the weight of the banner and the heat of the white wine he had drunk.

There was a roar of laughter and a cry of "There he is!" It was Berger, sure enough. His cap was on backward.

He was waving his flageolet slowly in the air to the tune of imaginary music. He got as far as the crowd, then sat down on the edge of the road and joined in the laugh. In a second or two he had gone to sleep.

"Soldiers," said Anatole Picard with dignity, "forward, march!"

CHAPTER VII

ON TO PARIS

It was evident, almost from the outset, that the Youth of Chatillon was going to have anything but a picnic so far as the marching was concerned.

The two old veterans, as soon as they had crossed the bridge and waved a last farewell to the school children, men and women who had accompanied them that far swung into a pace that filled the whitecaps with surprise.

There was just an even dozen of the followers, including Groisy, the color-bearer, and before the top of the first hill was reached Groisy was looking for a substitute. He complained of feeling sick, suggested that he must have been "touched by the sun."

His companions made mock of him, but Charles became increasingly tragic.

Toward the top of the hill he began to reel. There was a farmhouse there, and one of the whitecaps called out to the veterans that Groisy was in need of attention.

Groisy had dropped down at the edge of the road, panting, sweating like a winded horse.

Pierre came back and looked at him.

"Son," he said, "you have drunk too much. We'll leave you here. You can catch up with us later on."

"Me, I'll stay and take care of him," said Buteau, a notary clerk. Buteau made the sacrifice cheerfully. He was an undersized youth with small eyes and a nimble brain.

The new colors, now properly furled under Pierre's instructions, were passed on to two brothers, Jules and Gaston Large. They were heavy lads, with smooth, expressionless faces, which had won them various nicknames such as "Guinea-Pig" and "Rabbit."

As they had long harbored the design of going to Paris, anyway, in the expectation of getting jobs as hotel servants, they had joined the march as the cheapest way of getting there.

They now accepted the burden thrust upon them without protest, as real guinea-pigs accept the attentions of a vivisectionist.

There followed a section of the road which was delightful—a slight downgrade shaded by

a double row of poplars and occasional stretches of forest.

The remaining whitecaps plucked up courage, secretly prodded each other into laughing at the new color-bearers, occasionally even broke into snatches of such songs as the recruits sing when bound for their forced enlistment. The old veterans, Pierre and Anatole, plodded along shoulder to shoulder with scarcely a word.

By noon they had reached Pressy, a good eight kilometers on their way, and there they halted for food and rest at the Hôtel du Commerce, where the mayor was waiting to bid them welcome and the village fanfare gave them a serenade.

But here, also, the second casualties had to be reported.

Jules and Gaston, the color-bearers, discovered an uncle who was driving to Paris with a wagon-load of calves. With manifest joy they deserted their late comrades and drove away with the uncle and his calves, unheroic, perfectly content.

Not only that, but Joseph Deplanche, cousin of the apothecary, and vaguely the lieutenant of the marching club, although no one knew by

what right, took refuge with an aunt and refused, later, even to be interviewed.

"Only seven of us left," said Edgar Bazard, long accepted as the "handsomest young man in Chatillon." "Is it that we are going to renounce our plan? It is true that neither M. Picard nor M. Dupont seem to be crazy for our society, but think of the good times we were going to have."

"Me," spoke up Jean-Baptiste Michel, who was a plasterer, and perfectly at home wherever he found himself, "me, I was only going as far as Cabanons anyway. We reach there to-night. And say, Edgar, when you have seen the girls over there and tasted a certain sparkling wine I know about—"

During the afternoon the marchers, apart from the veterans, divided into two cliques.

For Edgar, Jean-Baptiste, and a youth named Adolphe were increasingly enthusiastic and secretive as to their plans for the night at Cabanons. The remaining four, two of whom were from a hamlet just outside of Chatillon and were thus regarded somewhat as foreigners, marched along with deepening silence and growing distrust.

It was to these four that Pierre Dupont addressed himself that evening at the tavern in Cabanons where they were to pass the night. Edgar, Jean-Baptiste, and Adolphe had already disappeared on their secret mission, not to return again.

"My young friends," said Pierre, "we have finished our first day's march. We have covered the first seventeen kilometers on the road to Paris. I now ask you to return to your homes. You have shown a worthy spirit.

"It is on such as you that our beloved country will have to depend in the hour of peril. For, as it has now been made manifest, he only is a good soldier and a true patriot who behaves himself as a Frenchman should in times of peace. *Vive la France! Vive la république!*"

Only Marie, the kitchen-maid, was astir the next morning when Pierre Dupont and Anatole Picard appeared, for it was still the gray light of early dawn.

But Marie gave them coffee and bread with a sort of yearning tenderness that reminded them of Annette; hovered about them in the drab and otherwise cheerless light, a personifi-

cation of all that women have ever stood for in the history of the world.

And, at the first bend in the street, they both turned and looked back. She was standing in the tavern door, and lifted her hand in a farewell salute.

"A fine girl," said Anatole.

"Are they not all like that?" Pierre reflected aloud.

Still in the gray, moist light, with only a few sparrows and hens to mark their passing, they put Cabanons behind them and were out on the open road again, this time alone.

Pierre had unshipped the colors from their heavy pole and had folded them into a compact package which he wore slung on his hip like a haversack. He was feeling fit and young again, so he said.

"When I lift my head to the morning breeze," he said, "and think of our errand and our destination, it is as though—away up there in the silver light—there was a choir of angels singing and the good Lord looking down from his throne.

"It is as though this road stretched straight up there, and that it is the Lord Himself, in-

stead of the president, who is going to give you your decoration—old comrade of an Anatole! That's the way I feel about it."

Anatole secretly loved these outbreaks of his friend, but he never gave any sign of it.

"To-day we do eighteen kilometers," he replied as he began to charge his pipe.

"And often I look up at the throne and I say: 'How about it, Friend-Lord? When art Thou going to return to me my Gabrielle?' And He smiles and says: 'Thou art in a hurry, my child. All in good time.'"

"And do you believe Him?" asked Anatole, affecting indifference.

"*Mais oui*," Pierre answered, with the utmost simplicity. "It was like that, I tell you, in the matter of your decoration. I used often to say, just in the same way—sort of jokingly, you know: 'And how about that decoration for Anatole?' I imagine that I even became something of a joke myself; something of a bore. But, there you are, a knight of the legion, old zou-zou, and as proud as *d'Artagnan*!"

Anatole smoked on in silence, absorbed in his own thoughts, apparently.

Now that there was no one to look at him,

except Pierre, he had lost a good deal of his military bearing. He was merely the old peasant in disguise—stolid, his back bent with labor and years, his eyes seeing nothing but the road and the condition of the crops, his mind, most likely, engaged with material things.

As for Pierre, he marched along with that same elation in his heart he had expressed a little while before.

The country unfolded to left and right of him a series of pictures, each more lovely than the last. The silver throne, on high, was dissolved in tender pink that somehow made him think again of Gabrielle.

It had been like this in the days of old when he and Anatole had been young conscripts together.

Was it possible that by some miracle the years had vanished into the nothingness whence they came, and that he and Anatole were boys again?

“Not yet,” said Anatole, speaking again after a long interval of meditation.

“Not yet—what?”

Anatole took his pipe from his mouth,

knocked out the ashes against the horny palm of his hand.

"Not yet in Paris, not yet a *chevalier*; and see, just now, when you were speaking, it was as though I also heard a little voice that said:

" 'Anatole Picard, you'll have no decoration save that from the President—on high! ' "

Before Pierre could respond to this curious and somewhat startling declaration of the hero, both of the old men were thrilled by the distant throb of drums, the rolling cadence of marching feet.

"A regiment!" cried Pierre. "It must be a regiment coming into Fontenelle."

CHAPTER VIII

COMRADES ALL!

It was true.

The regiment must have entered the outskirts of the village, whose church-spire had been visible for some time, for there was a sudden tinkling blare of martial music. The musicians, silent as long as they were out in the open country and the regiment marching at ease, were bringing the men up now to more military trim.

The preliminary blare swept into a heart-lifting refrain.

"If we cut through here we can arrive when they do," said Pierre, indicating a path to the left.

As tired as they were, they began to run. They passed through a meadow, skirted a pond where a few bullfrogs were still grumbling about the preceding night; came into a long and deeply shaded lane where numerous hens, like overly proper damsels, fled cackling at

their approach. And all this time the music was getting louder.

This was France; but suddenly it had been as though they were far from home, had heard—were hearing now—the call of friends. Then, just as the lane they were in debouched from between its screening hedges into an open space bordering another road, there it was—the regiment!

They were breathless.

They were still breathless as the drummers and clarions passed—the young men casting glances of amused sympathy in their direction. And then, mounted on a superb, light-footed bay, a man, gray like themselves, but younger; a waxed mustache, a shrewd, kind eye, a jaw of iron under a complexion as pink and fresh as a baby's, a form inclined to be stout, but upright and graceful, outlined perfectly in the uniform of red and black—*le général!*

Pierre Dupont and Anatole Picard, dusty, breathless, a little sad, found themselves side by side, heels together—was it possible that there were only two of them?—and their hands up in salute.

The general gave them a penetrating glance.

They felt it, rather than saw it, perhaps. There was something about the sensation almost as definite as speech. It was almost as though he had said:

“Oh, see! Two old *zou-zous* from Africa; soldiers to the souls of them! My children, I salute them.”

And he did, as though they were a couple of field-marshal standing there.

It was the season of the “great maneuvers” of the French army, held that year between Paris and the eastern frontier. Just to let Alsace-Lorraine know, perhaps, that it was not forgotten, the regiments of two army corps were concentrating in the neighborhood of historic battle-fields, and several of these regiments were stopping that night at Fontenelle.

As the last company swung past with the light step characteristic of the French soldier on the march, and the wagon-train lumbered near, Pierre and Anatole, obedient to a single impulse, turned to follow. They also would pass the night at Fontenelle.

It might have gone hard for two elderly strangers arriving at Fontenelle at such a time—the town overflowing with humanity, every

room taken, restaurants crowded with officers, peasants and villagers alike offering the simple hospitality of their kitchens to the men, but it was otherwise with Pierre and Anatole.

It was a case of "Comrades all!"

Hardly had the last regiment broken up into squads for the important work of preparing the regimental soup than the veterans were hailed on all sides with invitations to come and join in. Enough for eight, and there will be enough for ten, name of a pipe!

They were in paradise—the paradise of years rolled back. But upon the mind of Pierre the stimulation of old memories was to have a strange effect.

All the time that he was answering to the good-natured banter and jests of the boys in uniform, even when, later on in a village *cabaret*, he told them how it was that Anatole Picard came to be marching to Paris, it was as though Gabrielle were just there some place—a smile on her red lips, a look of tenderness in her otherwise malicious dark eyes.

It gave him an eery sense of uneasiness which he refused to acknowledge, even to himself. Still, there it was—during the band con-

cert given by the regimental musicians that evening in the village square; there when he and Anatole followed their impromptu hosts to the haymow that had been assigned to them as quarters for the night; there as into the deepening silence there floated the sweet and mournful notes of the *couvre-feu*—the close of the soldier's day.

What was it?

The snores of the young soldiers lifted around him, like swaying reeds of sound. In the midst of them he detected the guttural bass of Anatole himself, who also slept.

"I'm an old fool," said Pierre to himself.

But he lay there, staring through the open casement of the loft out into the cloudless, light-blue sky. The horn of a shimmering moon appeared, and he watched it, entranced. Again he thought of Gabrielle. Secretly he and she had often watched a moon like that.

Then, very distinctly in his imagination, he saw her coming toward him down the silver incline of the moonlight—as young and beautiful as the last time he had seen her.

"I knew all the time that you were alive," said Pierre, speaking silently.

"Yes, I'm still alive."

"And you wanted to see whether I had kept my promise to you about Anatole?"

"I never doubted but that you'd keep your promise, well beloved," she smiled back at him; "only—"

"Only what?" he faltered.

"See, your own heart has told you."

"Told me what?"

Pierre, in spite of the glow of happiness that had come over him at Gabrielle's presence, was swept from head to foot by a cold gust of fear. Strangely there occurred to him at the same time that curious remark Anatole had made about receiving his decoration straight from the hands of the eternal President—on high.

The words that came from his vision of Gabrielle found him prepared, therefore, but none the less thrust him through with a sickening pang of sorrow.

"That Anatole is soon to die!"

Pierre suddenly sat up. He was trembling, yet he wasn't cold. What was this fool's idea that had come into his head?

There was the open window, with the breeze billowing through—now redolent of frog-

ponds and dank woods, again bringing in the sweeter fragrance of dewy grass and honeysuckle. All of the moon was visible now, a glimmering, fragile crescent.

The frog chorus was giving a grand imitation of the drums and trumpets that had passed that day, while the crickets laughed and cheered. A rooster crowed that he was not afraid.

Then Pierre listened to the nearer sounds.

The soft snores of the sleeping boys appealed to some vague sense of paternity within him. Still he listened. There broke out once more the guttural rasp of the sleeping Anatole.

"Am I the old fool?" queried Pierre softly.

He turned himself stiffly; once more composed himself to rest.

CHAPTER IX

ANGELS AND MEN

Not even when, on the following morning, Anatole Picard sent a reassuring telegram to M. Dissard, the secretary of the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown, could Pierre quite get rid of that besetting "haunt" that had crept into his mind.

M. Dissard telegraphed:

"War correspondents now with army wire that you are on your way to Paris. Newspapers all carry stories. Nevertheless am anxious. Everything ready for the banquet. President will attend in person. National disaster if you fail us now."

Pierre, being handier with the pen, himself wrote the reply at Anatole's dictation:

"Anatole Picard will be there."

"Is that all?" asked Pierre. He was thinking of his own baseless misgivings.

"That's all," answered Anatole gravely.

And then, when they were out on the road by themselves once more, it was as though some cloud had come over the spirits of both of them. Perhaps it was the reaction of their contact with all that superabundant youth.

They were old men. Once they had been in a regiment of boys; but now they were old and stiff and gray, and all the other boys were dead.

Pierre would have liked to ask Anatole what he had meant by that remark of his—about getting his decoration from the eternal President—but he didn't dare. At the time he heard it he had attached no significance to it; but now—

"Do you know what I've been thinking, old man?" asked Pierre. "I've been thinking how much more comfortable we'd both be if we were walking in wooden shoes instead of these *sacré brogans*!"

Anatole refused to be diverted from his own somber reflections.

He might not be able to shine before these Parisians, *pardi*! But he could show them once

more that he was still the hero. Let the opportunity but present itself!

The deep lines in his bronzed and white-stubbled cheeks went deeper still with a bitter smile. He had thought of that fantastic habit of Pierre's, and himself sent up a petition savagely:

"Comrade-God! But send me the opportunity!"

"You see," said Pierre, more with an idea of cajoling his friend into a lighter mood than with any idea of imparting information, "this *sacré* old earth of ours is peopled by men and by angels, so to speak."

He was trying to get his own thoughts away from that haunting dream of Gabrielle back there.

"For example, each man—even you, old species of cannon—has some angel of a woman in his heart, as the soup has its perfume, as the bell its sound; and this, liberating itself, gives the thing its value—"

Anatole hadn't even heard.

But he had found a certain fierce consolation in that odd prayer of his. It was more of a challenge than a petition, anyway. He re-



"AROUND IT THE MOORS, SPLENDIDLY MOUNTED, CHARGE AND CIRCLE AND SKIRMISH."

peated it to himself triumphantly, as one repeats a demand which he knows isn't going to be refused:

"But send the opportunity!"

"And even in the matter of a regiment," Pierre continued his disquisition, "if it weren't for its music, its colors, that air of something or other that hangs over it and floats along with it—"

"Like the dust, you mean," said Anatole, at last conscious that his friend was speaking.

"Yes, like the dust," said Pierre intently—"like the dust to which the passing of a regiment has given heart and wings—"

Before he could finish what he had to say, which, after all, was one of those aimless monologues of his which might have continued for the rest of the afternoon—aimless except as an amusement and a consolation for the two of them—there befell a little incident, not in itself important, but which oddly increased that vague sense of uneasiness that had come into Pierre's mind.

They came upon a gipsy-camp pitched around a bend in the road—crawling with children; slim, dark women busy with basket-work

and little fires, all as Oriental as Arabs; a few men lounging about or asleep on the grass under the brightly painted wagons; dogs, silent but unfriendly, as is the way of gipsy-dogs when Gentiles pass.

And Pierre had another disquieting sensation to add to his collection.

He saw one of the older women look particularly at Anatole—not in an unfriendly way, only curiously. Then she muttered something that made the other women stare.

What had the old woman seen? Pierre asked himself. He had picked up some peculiar superstitions concerning gipsies during his stay in Algeria. One of these superstitions was that certain old women like that can see the pale angel of death trailing a man at times, even when he is in perfect health.

"Anatole Picard will be there!"

He repeated the words of the telegram he had sent as though they were a lucky charm.

To get to Paris was the all-important thing. They had put in a hard day's march, and a thousand indications told them that they were gradually putting the country behind them,

gradually penetrating the far-flung zone of the great city's influence.

Traffic increased and became more complex.

They were hardly ever out of sight of railroad trains, far or near, puffing along with the importance of the capital's business. They began to see heavy trolley-cars, suburban still, but suggestive of crowded populations.

The villages through which they passed began to look like detached fragments of Paris itself—with cabs, granite-paved streets, and restaurants that might have been expensive.

The same sort of change was apparent in the people.

There were fewer peasants about. Even the gardeners had about them something that reminded the veterans—each in his own way—of Dissard, secretary of the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown.

The villagers stared at them with more curiosity than kindness. Workmen and young idlers were apt to smile cynically as they passed. Even the gendarmes appeared cold.

Then came that unmistakable outpost of all proud cities—a huge prison, silent and grim.

They were an incredibly long time in passing

it by—in coming up to it, once they had understood the significance of that long, gray wall and the grated windows; in following the all but endless wall itself where it formed one side of the road; in shaking off its sinister spell once they had it behind their backs.

Even the road seemed to have taken on something of the curse—it lay so straight and orderly and cheerless.

Finally, however, it ran into a tree-shaded village, angled off down a hill, across an arched bridge and up a shaded ascent beyond.

It was at the next village, half a dozen kilometers further on, where they were to pass their third night, that yet another telegram from Dissard greeted them. It read:

"Am preparing for you an extraordinary surprise. Do not fail to appear."

"Send him the same answer," said Anatole. And Pierre did so:

"Anatole Picard will be there!"

CHAPTER X

FOLLOWING THE STAR

BUT on the following day they were so tired that they were long in getting started; and, try as he would, Pierre could not always fight off that hovering sense of dismay.

It was all very well for him to call himself a coward, to rail secretly at his cowardice. Even when he looked at the heroic Anatole, this feeling, if anything, was increased.

Anatole was looking older.

There was no doubt about it. He never complained. There was a look of philosophic patience in his eyes. But he was heavier of tread than ever, his rugged old form still more bent.

Seeing which Pierre occasionally tried to sing—

*Buvons donc du vin,
Buvons donc du vin,
Buvons donc du vin,
Pour nous faire du bien!*

But his voice and his heart both failed him.

Then, they missed their way—a thing increasingly easy to do as good roads multiplied and crisscrossed—and they marched almost eighteen kilometers in the wrong direction before they discovered their error.

Their fifth day out from Bienville was a Sunday, and they spent a good deal of it in resting up in preparation for the last forced march and triumphal entry.

There was still plenty of time. In spite of their lost time, Monday night should find them at the gates of Paris, now only twenty kilometers away. The great affair was set for eleven o'clock Tuesday morning, June 25.

An early start, and the appointed hour would find them marching into the *hôtel* of the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown. Anatole Picard would have kept his word!

Yet it was late on Monday afternoon when they got their first sight of the city. They saw it from a hilltop, where the road they were on split one of the forests that surrounded Paris on every side.

It had been another laborious day; in fact, the most laborious of any since their start; for

the kilometers which stretched out so smoothly and unbroken on the roads around Chatillon had here become amazingly complex and difficult.

Once Pierre had faltered to such an extent that he had urged Anatole to take a tram-car—one of those huge, double-decked steam affairs that would have helped them to complete their trip in no time—but Anatole had not even answered.

Anatole had been like that all day—taciturn, thoughtful.

He wasn't sullen. He still had that light of philosophic patience in his eyes. Now and then the wrinkles in his grizzled cheeks had again deepened to the semblance of a sardonic smile, when Pierre tried to joke or sing; but he had remained silent.

He was silent, even now, as they gazed at their city of promise.

It lay there, dim and human, in the late afternoon light, a hazy blue plain of roofs, chimneys and spires as far as the eye could see. Here and there the Seine was visible, like a silver ribbon, and there was the white fleck of

a temple on a distant hill which they knew must be Montmartre.

"Think, then, old comrade," Pierre exclaimed, "that this is Paris, that this is the heart of France, a heart that awaits you, warms for you, throbs for you!"

Anatole seated himself, stiffly and heavily, on a mound of turf at the side of the road.

"Think of the surprise that M. Dissard has prepared for you! What can it be? Is it that they will give you twice the regular pension? Is it that, perhaps, they will make you an honorary guard of Napoleon's tomb?"

Anatole wasn't looking in the direction of the distant city at all any more. He was looking at his friend. Suddenly, Pierre turned from his own rapt and prophetic gaze, and their eyes met.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Pierre softly.

"I am very tired," Anatole replied.

Pierre laughed tenderly.

"Of course, you're tired," he agreed; "and see, when we left the inn I prepared for just such a case."

He pulled out a small bottle of cognac, held it up to the light.

"Do you remember," he asked, almost playfully, "that day we were marching on Zenina, and we thought we were all in until I discovered, by accident, that I had just such a little bottle as this?"

"You think of everything," said Anatole, gruffly, as he pulled the cork.

"Ah," said Pierre, "when one has given his promise to Gabrielle!"

But, in spite of the energy infused into the old hero by the stimulant and the renewed—affected, perhaps—liveliness of Pierre, Anatole was slow in getting to his feet, heavier than ever as he took up the march, although the road now led down hill. And, more than ever, each kilometer became an enemy hard to overcome.

Paris dropped out of sight. The sun went down.

They had been walking scarcely half an hour since their last halt when Anatole sat down again.

To Pierre's anxious questioning, Anatole's

only answer was that remark he had made a while ago:

"I am very tired. The light wavers."

"I'm going to hire a horse," said Pierre. "There must be plenty of them around here. It's legitimate for soldiers to commandeer horses at any time."

"*Mais non,*" Anatole persisted. "A little rest, and I'll be all right."

By the time they had emerged from the woods and found themselves in a vast flat plain given over to the interminable market-gardens whence Paris draws much of its daily food, night had fallen; and now, whatever Anatole might think of it, Pierre was determined that the very next time they came to a tram-line the march should end for good.

But they came to no tram-line. They did not even pass a house. There were many houses in the distance, but it was as though the road had entered a marsh, so level and deserted lay the land around them.

Suddenly Pierre let out an exclamation.

"We seem to be leaving Paris behind us!"

It was true. As they paused and looked off at an angle from the direction in which they

had just come they could see a vast, pale glow. They looked at this for almost a full minute.

"Paris, where art thou?" asked Pierre, although his heart had gone heavier than ever.

"That can't be Paris," said Anatole, at last, with slow assurance. "When we looked at Paris from the top of the hill Paris was due west. I could tell from the sun. But that glimmer there is north, as you can see by the north star."

"The north star!" Pierre exclaimed. "I had forgotten it. I had forgotten how it used to guide us in the desert. But I can't see it. Are you sure?"

"I see it," Anatole answered simply. "And we'll have to get off of this road because it is leading us northeast. What we want to do is to march northwest."

"I don't like to leave the road," Pierre protested. "It's pretty dark."

"Follow me," said Anatole.

They crossed a ditch and, after a brief search, found an opening in the hedge beyond, and then, passing on, found themselves in a field of cabbages.

The walking would have been comparatively

easy here—almost as easy as out on the open road—only every now and then, after consulting his guiding star, Anatole would change direction and cut across the rows of cabbages at an angle.

As for Pierre, he couldn't see the star at all.

New life appeared to have come into Anatole now that his mind was occupied with a soldierly duty. And for a long time Pierre said nothing. Pretty soon now, he told himself, they would come to a certain house, the lighted window of which he could see ahead of them. But Anatole changed direction again.

"Old friend," said Pierre, "are you sure of that star of yours? You know, our old eyes—"

Before he could complete what he was about to say he saw Anatole pause, straighten his curved back, look up in an odd and unforgettable way.

"Yes, there's the star," said Anatole. "There's the star—there's the—"

Pierre had leaped forward, caught Anatole as he reeled.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF A FRIEND

THAT star, visible to the eyes of Anatole Picard but invisible to Pierre Dupont, had guided them well in one respect.

It had brought them close to the house of a friend. Years ago the Widow Lucas herself had been a belle of Chatillon, and it needed but a mention of that name to quicken her interest and sympathy when Pierre came staggering to her door, half supporting, half dragging his all but inanimate friend.

She lived alone with a stalwart nephew, he of the cabbage-field. The house was small and neat; and while Pierre was still explaining incoherently, with broken wind and heart, the nephew had lifted Anatole in his brawny arms and placed him on a spotless bed.

The nephew and Pierre undressed him with clumsy, kindly haste, while the widow hastily blew up a charcoal fire to heat water for a strengthening punch.

It was strange, but all this time Pierre was saying over and over to himself:

"Anatole Picard will be there! Anatole Picard will be there!"

Just as though that was the most important thing in the universe; while, as a matter of fact, the only thing in the universe about which he cared was that Anatole might be all right again.

Then, with a gripping sense of horror, there again swept in on Pierre Dupont all his premonitions, his secret fears, a repetition of that vision he had seen in the night and the imagined words of Gabrielle—all these things. And he tried to stem the tide of them by repeating again:

"Anatole Picard will be there! Anatole Picard will be there!"

What was the meaning of it all? Surely the good Lord couldn't have prepared such a tragic jest as this—not on two old French soldiers! Not on Anatole, at any rate!

Anatole!

As he started to hang over the back of a chair the old Zouave jacket which the nephew



"OH, 'T WAS THEN DEATH TOOK ME BY THE HAND . . . I WAS FACE TO FACE WITH GABRIELLE."

handed him there fell from a pocket of it the stained old service-book of a French soldier.

There was the bullet-hole in it. There was the black imprint of Anatole's heroic blood.

"*Ah Dieu!*" Pierre murmured. "*Ah Dieu!*"

His hands trembled so as he picked up the book that he could scarcely hold it. Then, as though mere contact with it had brought to him some special touch of divinity, some hint of heroism that he otherwise could not have conceived, he slipped the book into his own pocket.

By the time that they had Anatole in bed the widow came hurrying in with a steaming punch, strong and fragrant.

Anatole, who had fainted, opened his eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You're just taking a little rest," said Pierre in such tones as he might have used in quieting Céleste.

"Where's Gabrielle?" asked Anatole.

The question left Pierre stunned. It had come so unexpectedly, in a voice so natural. And yet, in spite of this, there was something about it that made even the Widow Lucas think of things long past.

"Take a swallow of this punch, *monsieur*,"

she said, leaning over Anatole and putting the glass to his lips.

But Anatole didn't care to drink. His eyes sought Pierre.

"I hate to disappoint—Gabrielle—and *mon-sieur le président*—" he began.

"I'm going to run and get the doctor," said the nephew, trying to control his rebellious voice.

The widow stood by with her ineffective punch. It steamed slowly in the yellow lamp-light like something yielding up inevitably the warmth of life.

The big nephew, blond and innocent, like some huge child, went out of the room, his shoulders bulking larger than ever as he knuckled an eye.

In the sudden silence that followed Anatole seemed to hear a familiar strain.

"What is that?" he asked quite calmly. "Is that the military band or merely Loiseau's phonograph?"

"I guess it must be the military band," said Pierre.

"'Tis true," said Anatole; "that Loiseau couldn't have his phonograph here in Algeria."

Again the Widow Lucas bent forward and put the steaming glass to Anatole's lips.

"There now," she urged; "you just take a sip of this. I'm sure it will do you good. My husband was always better when he had a swallow of hot punch. It was even so in his very last days."

Anatole drank gratefully.

"Is not every woman a Gabrielle?" he asked serenely.

"Dear old Anatole, you're going to be all right in a little while," said Pierre, although when he said it he knew that he was lying—lying for his own sake even more than for the sake of Anatole. "We walked too far. It was all my fault. We'll take a carriage, you and I, and the president—"

"Ah, it is you—Anatole Picard!" cried the widow. "I've read about you in the newspaper."

She was looking at Pierre. Pierre was looking at Anatole.

"*Mais, oui*," whispered Pierre.

"Did I hear the voice of Gabrielle?" asked Anatole.

"Not yet," Pierre replied.

"And you'll say to Gabrielle," said Anatole as Pierre bent near; "you'll say—"

"Old comrade," whispered Pierre, smiling.

Pierre had dropped to his knees at the side of the bed. He was still there, trying to get the words that came, fragile and small, from Anatole's lips, when the big nephew of the Widow Lucas came tiptoeing, frightened, to the door.

"The doctor isn't at home," he said. "He's gone to Vincennes."

"Go get the curate," the widow whispered.

She had lived long—and sorrowfully. There were certain signs which she could not fail to recognize.

And as the lamp burned dim and through the uncurtained window there came at last the first blue light of another day, Anatole Picard passed away.

He who had faced death in a hundred forms, violent chiefly, and who had been shot at, scarred, drained of his blood by hostile arms, lay in a spotless bed, in a quiet cottage in the midst of a field of cabbages, while certain great men, unsuspecting, were waiting over there in awakening Paris.

Pierre, his face set and white, yet suffused

with a strange, unearthly tenderness, such as one is more apt always to find on the face of a woman than the face of a man, still watched at his comrade's side.

He had undone that package of his, had spread over the body of the hero that new banner he had brought with them on their way, the flag they had followed so sturdily from Chatillon, flaunting to the breeze those words of Anatole himself: "*We Are French!*"

The curate had come and gone. The Widow and her nephew, worn out at last by this tragic night, following on a day of such grinding toil as the market-gardeners around Paris know, had gone to get a little sleep.

Finally Pierre got up and looked out of the window—over to the east, toward the rising sun.

He drew from his pocket the service book that had belonged to Anatole. He held it up to the light, panted brokenly for a moment or two in search of proper words. Then the form of address that Anatole had sometimes used sprang to his lips.

"Oh, Comrade-God," he murmured; "you'll understand! You'll understand!"

CHAPTER XII

SEE, THE HERO COMES

As Franciade-Fleurus Dissard, secretary of the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown, cast a final glance over the banquet-room of the splendid building recently constructed for the housing of that organization, he felt a wave of elation.

Everything was perfect, from architecture to napkins, from the domed and frescoed ceiling to the polished floor.

The room was long and lofty. Along one side of it were high French windows, opening upon a charming little park. On the other side, opposite the windows, were corresponding mirrors, which gave back an added sense of light and space.

Between the windows and between the mirrors were groups of graceful palms and flowering shrubs. At one end was a floral bower for the orchestra. At the other were the double doors leading from the reception-room.

More than once in the history of France, M. Dissard reflected, had a citizen been made a chevalier of the Legion of Honor for arrangements less complete.

He passed slowly along the snow-white table which stretched its flower-decked length from one end of the room to the other, assured himself for the tenth time that the card bearing his own name was properly placed at the president's right.

The president himself would be seated at the right of old General Hocquincourt, honorary head of the society; but, so Dissard told himself, he would practically have the president to himself.

Again, like sweet music, there rippled across the chords of his heart the words:

"Dissard, chevalier of the Legion of Honor!"

And why not?

But almost immediately he was experiencing a little qualm of sickness again. He had come to the place at General Hocquincourt's left, was reading the card—"M. Anatole Picard."

Where was Picard?

For three days now he had had no word from

him. That qualm of sickness had become a familiar thing with him, but its familiarity had robbed it of none of its terrors. What if Picard failed to show up?

M. Dissard thrust two manicured fingers into the pocket of his perfect waistcoat, pulled out a telegram.

"Anatole Picard will be there."

He thrust a hand into the inside pocket of his perfect frock coat, pulled out another telegram, a counterpart of the other one in all except the date.

"Anatole Picard will be there."

He thought of the pieces that had been published in the papers, of his own carefully guarded secret concerning the surprise he had prepared; he thought of the president, of General Hocquincourt, of all the other notables who would be there that day to see the creation of one more national hero.

And what if something had happened to him? What if he should fail to appear!

White, with beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, M. Dissard sought the good graces of the steward who had the serving of

the banquet in charge, demanded and drained a glass of ancient *fine*.

It was ten o'clock, and still there was no sign of the hero. Inquiries by telephone at the different gates of Paris brought no information. Neither did further inquiries to the hamlets on all the more important roads.

M. Dissard resolved himself to patience and prayer. As a matter of fact, there was little time for either. The guests were beginning to arrive.

They were chiefly the members of the society at first—the younger members, at that—young men faultlessly attired, silk-hatted, patent-leathered, kid-gloved. Dissard almost wept in telling them of his anxiety, and his anxiety became their own. A fiasco would immerse them all in humiliation.

They also telephoned.

Older and more substantial members arrived, some of them bringing with them influential members of the government. The reception-room was beginning to be crowded.

By twenty minutes to eleven the important bevy of journalists, there to report the affair, had sent a formal demand to M. Dissard that

the hero be produced forthwith so that he could be properly photographed and interviewed. They had begun to suspect that, for some fell purpose of his own, the secretary of the society had been keeping the hero sequestered.

Dissard was still explaining to them that the hero had not yet arrived but was on his way when there was a burst of music and every one in the reception-room who had been seated immediately stood up.

It was the president of the republic, met at the gate by General Hocquincourt.

M. Dissard should also have been at the gate. The journalists had held him back. He could have wept.

But the president, cool and smiling, was evidently unconscious of the slight. The general, very red and warm in his tight uniform, was none the less merry in his own way.

M. Dissard, tearing himself free from the last of the journalists to hold him, leaped forward and caught General Hocquincourt's eye. The general introduced the secretary, and then, while he and the president were still shaking hands, asked bluntly:

"Well, young man, where is our hero? Trot him out."

M. Dissard again went white, even while he felt as though he were being burnt alive.

"He hasn't come yet," he answered weakly.

"Get him," said the general, lightly, as he led the president away.

And, even in this brief interval, a rumor had got abroad that there was something amiss, that the person every one had come to honor had shown himself indifferent. The journalists got hold of this, were beginning to make the most of it.

M. Dissard fled from them, fled from every one to the privacy of his own little office.

Out there in the reception-room was the president of the republic, heads of government departments, army officers, men prominent in every walk of life, and he, Dissard, was to see them disappointed, himself disgraced.

Again he looked at the telegrams, recognized how impossible it would be to present them as a palliation or excuse.

Instead of the red ribbon of the Legion which might have adorned his own chest some day, he thought of the mark that might be left

there by a certain pearl-handled little instrument of destruction in the drawer of his desk.

He was still a prey to the exquisite agony of his indecision when there came to his ears an odd sensation of some change having occurred in the reception-room. It wasn't a burst of sound. It was more like a fanfare of silence.

What could it be?

He flung open the door of his office just as that preliminary lull was shattered by a perfect storm of "*Vives!*" and "*Picards!*"

Dissard could have fainted.

Just entering the wide doors of the reception-room, apparently surprised to find such a crowd there and to hear the shouting that greeted him, was a little old man in the uniform of a French Zouave.

The hero had arrived!

CHAPTER XIII

"ANATOLE PICARD SALUTES YOU!"

HE was dusty and unkempt. There was a first impression that he was in pain, his face was so sad and white. Then that impression went out altogether, not to come back again, as the old man in the Zouave uniform tossed up his head proudly, looked about him with a flashing eye.

"What a profile!" a journalist exclaimed.

"Not only a soldier but a poet!" said another.

"One of the glories of old France!" commented a third.

But while the hall still rang with acclamations M. Dissard had jumped forward with the fervor of his pent-up hopes and recent despair, had thrust his immaculate black sleeve under the faded blue of the veteran's.

"The president awaits," the secretary cried.

The old man, as straight as a ramrod, his white mane on his shoulders, his blue eyes flash-

ing, marched forward through the applauding crowd to where General Hocquincourt, now perfectly at ease, was conversing affably with the head of the nation.

"*Monsieur le général*," said M. Dissard, "I have the honor to present to you M. Anatole Picard."

"My comrade!" cried the general, with paternal affability.

Said the veteran: "Anatole Picard has the honor to salute you!"

It was the general's turn. He faced the head of the nation.

"*Monsieur le président*," he said, "I have the honor to present to you a French soldier, Anatole Picard."

The president was a shrewd observer of men. To himself he said: "Now I understand the spirit of valor. What a light in his eye!" And aloud: "We are proud to shake your hand. We are proud to be fellow Frenchmen."

Again the veteran spoke:

"*Monsieur le président*, Anatole Picard salutes you."

The phrasing delighted the journalists. It delighted every one who heard it. There was

something so modest about it, so old-fashioned, and yet so dignified.

It was evident that both the president of the republic and the president of the society were touched.

It had been intended that General Hocquincourt should escort the president to his place at the banquet table, while M. Dissard followed with the veteran on his arm. Instead of that, quite spontaneously, the president had taken the veteran by one arm and the general by the other.

The three of them marched into the banquet hall side by side.

Then there occurred another little incident that the journalists delighted in.

As the distinguished group appeared the leader of the orchestra waved his baton and the musicians struck into the "Marseillaise," as they always did when the president of the republic appeared.

But then it was seen that from the veteran's eyes tears were streaming. He had to release the arm that the general was holding in order that he might wipe his eyes with the back of his hand.

General Hocquincourt had slipped his arm about the old man's shoulders. The veteran smiled up at him, tossed his head.

"Anatole Picard," he said, "can never hear that old song without a tear in his eye."

"*Bon Dieu!*" exclaimed Marchand, of the *Presse*; "to think that there is still some one in France who can weep at the sound of the 'Marseillaise'!"

And he jotted down a record of the fact, as did the others.

"My boy," said General Hocquincourt, a little later, as he benevolently assimilated everything that came his way and, at the same time, tried to make the veteran feel at ease—the president of the republic was being entertained by Dissard, apparently—"My boy, you don't seem to be very hungry to-day."

"No, *mon général*."

"Now," the general went on, strangely attracted to the hero and recalling social difficulties in his own career, no doubt, "after the president has hung the cross on you and they begin to call for a speech, don't you get frightened?"

"No, *mon général*."

"Just sail right in and tell them about that

little affair at Sidi-Baroun. Take a glass of this *Château*. It'll brace you up."

"*Oui, mon général.*"

But the veteran seated there, as the general had remarked, wasn't hungry at all. He had no taste for food, although he had scarcely eaten a thing in twenty-four hours.

He was thinking of that comrade of his who lay, even now, in a humble cottage in the remotest outskirts of Paris. What had happened?

Was it true that Anatole was dead, that he had come to take his place rather than see him cheated by death of this supreme reward? Or was it he, Pierre Dupont, who had died, and this person whom they were honoring, who was listening to a general address him with familiar affection—was it not Anatole Picard, after all?

His head was swimming. He saw but vaguely the vast room where they were, heard but vaguely the babble of speech and music.

There were many friendly faces turned in his direction. There were palms and flowers about. Waiters he could not see at all put things in front of him and took them away

again. Now and then the voice of the general reached him, kindly but unreal, and he heard his own voice answering *oui* or *non*.

But the only vision that was real—as he knew after contemplation—was the occasional flash he had of Anatole Picard's beloved face with the majesty of death upon it, the occasional echo of his dying words:

"Tell Gabrielle!"

"Ah, yes, old comrade—I'll tell her!"

"Did you speak, my friend?" asked General Hocquincourt.

"*Non, mon général.*"

The general laughed.

"You're going over that speech of yours. You're all right. They won't mind it if you do stumble about a bit. We soldiers, *parbleu!* are not supposed to be orators."

That same sense of uncanny unreality still hovered about Pierre, as the music stopped and a gradual silence, intense, charged with emotion, swept through the room, and General Hocquincourt got slowly to his feet.

He said something that Pierre could not understand, that he heard as though it had been

spoken from a distance through a tunnel. Then there was cheering.

What was the meaning of that thing that the general was saying direct to him, and why was he getting to his feet?

Was he Pierre Dupont or was he Anatole Picard?

"Oh, Anatole!" he cried in his heart, "you are here and this is you! See, the nation honors you, at last! At last!"

He was on his feet and there was a fresh outburst of cheering.

There was the president of the republic standing in front of him. It wasn't quite so bad now as when the general was speaking. There were words spoken by the president which he could catch—"Honor of France," "Glory of the French army," and that ever-recurring name, "Anatole Picard!"

Pierre's head was swimming.

He felt that there was a reversal of the facts as he had believed them—that it was, indeed, he who lay dead in the outskirts of Paris, that it was, indeed, Anatole, "the glory of Chatillon," who bowed his head as a red ribbon was slipped over it, who lifted his face and felt the

president's breath on first one cheek and then the other as the head of the nation gave him the accolade.

Then he was standing there alone, looking up and down an endless, double row of faces.

He heard a ripping, spasmodic outburst:

"Vive, Picard! Vive Anatole Picard!"

Long live Anatole Picard—and him lying dead!

Pierre tossed back his long white name. His eyes and his mind went clear. He lifted a hand.

"My friends," he said.

CHAPTER XIV

FROM BEYOND THE TOMB

THERE was a moment when he was looking down into the eyes of General Hocquincourt, and the general was looking back into his. " 'Tis for the army," the general seemed to say.

There was a moment when he was looking into the eyes of the president of the republic, and the president was looking back into his. " 'Tis for France," the head of the nation seemed to say. And then there floated once more across Pierre's vision a memory portrait of Anatole as he had last looked at him, and his heart said: "For you, old friend!"

When the cheering ceased Pierre was as calm as though he were seated once more back in Loiseau's tavern in Chatillon, and no one there to listen to him by the mayor, M. Pomponneau, and Berger, the sexton, and Deplanche, the druggist.

"My friends," he said, in his vibrant voice, "this day the spirit of Anatole Picard salutes

you, one and all. He is modest. He never sought earthly glory. It was always glory enough for him that he was French!"

The president started the applause at that, and he leaned over to General Hocquincourt and whispered:

"Your old boy knows how to speak."

"But, none the less, this additional glory that you bestow upon him to-day is doubly sweet. You see, there are those who love him—some of them living and some who are dead."

At this M. Dissard, the secretary, gave a slight start, smiled.

"And in honoring Anatole Picard are you not honoring them? Is not his joy their joy? Will they not all wear the red ribbon on their breasts, now that he is so adorned?"

The silence in the hall grew absolute. Even the waiters and musicians were listening.

"And then there is Anatole Picard himself." Pierre smiled sweetly, tossed his head. "He thought that he would come before his Comrade-God with only that decoration gained in the battle of Sidi-Baroun. He wears it still."

Pierre brought from his pocket the perfo-

rated service-book, looked at it with a kindling eye, held it aloft.

"French blood!" he thrilled.

There were husky murmurs of "Bravo!" and "Good! Good!"

"But now, old soldier, march on with another decoration still. Confront your Lord and say:

" 'You blew your breath into a little dust and made a child of it, and the work was far from complete. You gave the child a sister—a marvel of love and beauty—whose name was Gabrielle. Under Gabrielle's care the child became a peasant. And then, when he was strong enough, the work of Your creation was further carried on by France, O Lord!'

"Yes, France sent this blundering, half-formed creature to Africa. She taught him thirst. She taught him hunger. She taught him fatigue. She taught him to sing for grief, to laugh for pain. She taught him to be merry with a broken heart. She taught him—to obey.

"Until one day, his lessons learned, he lifted his bugle to his lips—O Comrade-God, Thou knowest the rest! Thou, Gabrielle, and France had made—a man!"

Pierre's voice suddenly broke, in spite of

himself. He was still holding the service-book aloft, his eyes turned up to it.

"Not much," he said; "but a work of love. And he loved you so well in return. Ah *oui!* He loved you so well in return! Thou, O God; and thou, O Gabrielle; and thou, O France——"

Delayed applause broke out. Old General Hocquincourt was clapping his hands like mad. The eyes of the president of the republic were shining. His lips formed "Bravo!" but his voice failed him. The younger members of the society, however, were shouting loudly enough for every one there.

Pierre became a little confused. He lost the thread of what he had been saying. He looked about him with a smile in which there was a little something of fright and pain.

"We old soldiers are not supposed to be orators," he remarked, still smiling, and his eyes sought those of General Hocquincourt for approbation.

"Go on, chevalier," roared the general. "*Sapristi!* You're doing magnificently well!"

And there was more applause at that, hearty and long-drawn out. But the speaking was

... NO LONGER THE "GLORY OF CHATILLON" MERRILY, BUT THE "GLORY OF FRANCE."



over so far as Pierre was concerned. He looked at Anatole's service-book tenderly, replaced it in the pocket of his jacket.

Then, in the hush that gradually settled over the place, Franciade-Fleurus Dissard got to his feet. It was the psychological moment for that surprise of his. He cast his eyes about him, then looked across at the veteran.

"Anatole Picard!" he said in a loud voice keyed up with excitement.

Again polite tumult broke out—cries of "No, no," for M. Dissard; cries of "Let the chevalier continue," for Pierre.

The leader of the orchestra, with a sweep of his baton, let out a few bars of the "Marseillaise." But he got a signal to stop it.

It was quite evident that the banqueters wished to hear more yet.

Pierre smiled at them, pleased, but harried.

His speech had been so different from the kind usually heard at banquets that it had caught every one by surprise.

Almost every one was touched, warmed, sympathetic. The president of the republic and General Hocquincourt were again clapping

their hands. The leader of the orchestra plunged his men once more into the first bars of the "Marseillaise."

But M. Dissard would not down.

The noise and the confusion only nerved him to greater effort. At a wave of his hand the leader of the orchestra had brought his men again to a sudden halt. The applause and the cries subsided.

Once more M. Dissard cried the name: "Anatole Picard!"

That instinctive knowledge that occasionally comes to crowds that there is something important afoot crept now from one banqueter to another, quieting and subduing them, until there was silence again.

Besides, all Frenchmen are gifted with dramatic feeling.

"Anatole Picard," said M. Dissard softly and rapidly, yet in tones that all could hear, "we heard the story of your sainted sister Gabrielle; how you left her, young and beautiful; how, when you returned from doing your duty for your country, she was gone; how you searched for her throughout the years in vain. Now France has found her, safe again. France

restores you to her and her to you in this, your hour of triumph."

"Gabrielle!"

Those sitting near him saw a haunted look come into the veteran's face, saw him reel slightly. The name had dropped from his parted lips as a man dying of thirst might gasp aloud for water.

But the eyes of most of those present were turned to one of the mirror-screened doors which had been thrown open. They saw, first, a group of fashionably attired women, and then, in the midst of them, a small, old lady, dressed in black—a little, old lady whose face was stamped at once with everything in the world there could possibly be of grief—and joy.

CHAPTER XV

AFTER MANY YEARS

SHE was all but overcome. It was all that she could do to walk. She faltered, looked about her, smiled while the tears coursed down her wrinkled cheeks, turned a little to the left, then to the right.

And Pierre Dupont?

Stricken!

At first there quavered through his brain the thought that he had been taken in his infamy, that he had perpetrated a lie on this, the most sacred occasion of his life, and that now he was found out.

He stifled this thought, prayed to God, prayed to the soul of Anatole.

A measure of peace came to him. This was Gabrielle. Were not other prayers of his thus answered? Gabrielle!

And the name brought back to him a whiff of the romance and poetry and glamour of all these fifty years that had rolled between.

His breast swelled, he panted for breath, and then, without volition, obedient to the stored-up memories and hopes and yearnings of half a century, he gasped her name.

“Gabrielle!”

She stopped. She seemed about to fall.

General Hocquincourt had seen that his veteran was in distress. Like the gallant gentleman that he was, he had leaped immediately to his feet and had his arm once more about the old man’s narrow shoulders. One of the fashionably dressed women had performed a similar service for Gabrielle.

“Brother and sister!” sprang from many lips.

Every one there was familiar with the story. The journalists had written it up. Some of them also knew how, only recently, Gabrielle Picard had been found again after all these years of oblivion.

Gabrielle drew near, her old eyes blinded with tears, but the light of heaven in her face. She put out a quavering hand. Pierre took the hand in his.

“I knew—I knew thy voice,” she said.

She was holding Pierre's hand now in both of hers.

"I knew! I knew!" she sobbed.

What was it that Gabrielle knew?

There was a moment when she and the veteran Zouave remained there like that, speechless, soul to soul—as though they were young again, and they were far off in the country together some place, and it was moonlight and a nightingale was singing.

So it impressed those who were there.

Then Gabrielle caught the hand she held to her lips. They were in each other's arms.

Incidentally, it should be mentioned that M. Francaide-Fleurus Dissard, secretary of the Society for the Perpetuation of French Renown, was likewise made a chevalier of the Legion of Honor. His name was put on the president's mental list that day, and the president was one of those men who never forget.

For in the course of his long private and official career had he ever had such a day as this? It was he himself who proposed the toast to the reunited pair.

And as he looked at them—so might his own father and mother have looked, for he also was

of peasant stock—there was such a feeling of sad gladness in his heart as he hadn't experienced for many a day.

Once the president attempted a polite remark.

"*Madame*," he said. He got no further.

"Not *madame*, but *mademoiselle*," she answered softly.

During the pleasantly informal festivities that followed the old people sat there side by side, hand in hand.

Once again Gabrielle lifted her face and whispered those words of hers:

"I knew! I knew!"

What was it that she knew?

Pierre wondered; but he wondered in a daze that was half dream, half waking—half present, half misty past.

He bowed his head once and whispered:

"I also knew!"

But most of the time he was communing with spirits—even there in this brilliant hall, with all these well-dressed people about him, even when the president was once more clasping his hand and bidding him farewell and wishing him long years of future happiness.

He was communing with spirits—with the spirit of Anatole, the spirit of a girl with yellow hair.

With the palms and wreaths of honor showered upon him, with the diploma of his knighthood and the precious insignia once more in their morocco case, the hero of the day, accompanied by Gabrielle, at last drove away from the palace where they had been entertained.

They were in an open carriage that had been placed at their disposition, and the appearance of the old couple, in addition to the fact that the carriage was otherwise filled with flowers and the other fact that a dozen journalists were following in other vehicles, attracted much attention as they passed down the Champs-Élysées and the Rue de Rivoli.

The coachman had received his instructions.

It wasn't for him to question why. He drove straight to a small street in the proximity of the Central Markets. There Pierre got out and met the journalists as they came driving up.

"My friends," said Pierre gently, "I am now going to hire a market-wagon—I'm an old peasant, you know—and Gabrielle and I are going to drive out into the country. As one

Frenchman to his brothers, I ask you not to follow us. Good luck! Good day!"

They all shook hands with him and Gabrielle and left them there. And a little later, when Pierre lifted his hand, the stout nephew of the Widow Lucas drove up—with a stout wagon, to which was hitched a plump Normandy horse.

He and Pierre put all the flowers and wreaths and palms into the wagon, and Pierre said good-by to the coachman of the carriage and shook hands with him. Then, with the morocco case under his arm, he helped Gabrielle to a comfortable position on the seat that the nephew had prepared for them in the back of the wagon.

It was a busy part of Paris. There were few spectators. The nephew cracked his whip. The plump Norman trotted off.

Pierre and Gabrielle sat side by side. His arm was about her and she was leaning against him; but for a long, long time neither of them spoke.

They had passed beyond the city wall before Gabrielle raised her face, brushed his forehead with her hand, and asked:

"Pierre, where *is* Anatole?"

CHAPTER XVI

WITH MILITARY HONORS

It was getting along toward dusk.

Was it a trick of the failing light? But as Pierre looked back at her—his face close to hers—his heart leaped and fluttered like the flame of a candle in a breeze. He was seeing the same light in her eyes that he had seen there years ago.

He kissed her.

The fat Norman swerved to one side. There was the honk and flash of a passing motor-car. Those in the tonneau had seen the strangely garbed man kiss the woman at his side.

They laughed, flung back the one word "Masqueraders," and were gone.

"You knew back there in the hall, beloved, that——"

"That you were Pierre."

"That it wasn't Anatole."

"Ah, when I heard you pronounce my name——"

"My voice was strangled."

"And when I felt the touch of your hand. I couldn't see. Tears blinded me. I needed no eyes. Do you remember the last time you pronounced my name—the last time you touched my hand? What woman would forget?"

"But—God forgive me—those automobilists were right."

Once more Gabrielle pressed Pierre's hands to her lips.

"A masquerade!" said Pierre.

"You did it for Anatole."

"For Anatole and you."

"And he is dead," she whispered.

"Your name was the last on his lips. For him, for you—I went on into Paris—to claim the prize for him that could not go to claim himself."

Not long afterward, in the cottage where he lay, Gabrielle and the Widow Lucas and Pierre put the flowers and palms about the dead hero's body. On his old friend's breast Pierre placed the cross of the legion.

To any one with imagination it would have seemed that at that moment Anatole Picard breathed again, that his scarred old breast once

more rose and fell, quickened to life by this supreme caress of the country he had so dearly loved.

And they knelt there beside him. Then, while Gabrielle and the widow shed the frugal, all-comprehensive tears of age, Pierre Dupont prayed.

"O God—see—Anatole salutes thee—honored of France. Receive him—in her name!"

They accompanied him, so honored, back to Chatillon, and all the papers in Paris carried stories of how Anatole Picard, a national hero, had won recognition just in time.

There was a file of soldiers from the nearest garrison town there on the day they carried Anatole from the scarred cottage in Chatillon to the church—while Berger, repentant, tolled the cracked bell in the squat, stiff belfry. And the soldiers presented arms again as they carried the dead hero thence to the silent bivouac on the hill.

For this was the funeral of Anatole Picard, chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

On pleasant afternoons, while the sparrows fight in the linden trees and Loiseau plays the "Marseillaise" on his phonograph, Pierre Du-

pont, with Gabrielle, comes to the presbytery garden to call on M. Agneau and Mlle. Marie. And, by and by, the postman drops in, and M. Pomponneau, the mayor; Deplanche, and the others.

And they talk of Anatole, no longer "the Glory of Chatillon" merely, but "the glory of France."

THE END

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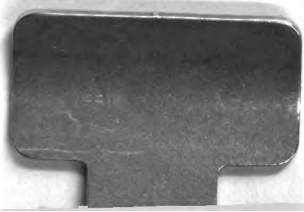
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